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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000617

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SMALL CROWD, FEW SURPRISES AT DASHNAK RALLY

Classified By: CDA Joseph Pennington. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

1.(C) SUMMARY: The September 2 protest rally by the ARF/Dashkaksutyun party drew a crowd of about 500 supporters to downtown Yerevan. Party leaders repeated their concerns that President Sargsian is prepared to give away too much in an effort to establish relations with Turkey and resolve the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. They called for the resignation of Foreign Minister Nalbandian and warned they would push for the President's resignation if he formally adopted the Madrid Principles. END SUMMARY.

TURNOUT SMALL, UNENTHUSIASTIC

12. (SBU) On September 2, the 18th Anniversary of NK's self-declared independence, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutyun Party (Dashnaks) rallied approximately 500 supporters in central Yerevan to again condemn President Sargsian's policy on Turkey and warn against any deal on Nagorno Karabakh that would deny the region's aspirations for independence. Dashnak leaders criticized the recently published protocols on Armenia-Turkey relations and claimed that the Sargsian administration had agreed to make additional concessions to Azerbaijan as part of the deal to resolve the dispute over Nagorno Karabakh. Vahan Hovannisian, leader of the Dashnak faction in the National Assembly, stated "Even after these protocols were published, the Turkish Foreign Minister reminded Azerbaijan that its interests would be taken into account at all stages of Armenia-Turkey rapprochement. Thus they will either try to force us to our knees by demanding concessions, or the road will simply remain closed."

13. (SBU) The rally speakers declared that all of Turkey's well-known preconditions are reflected in the text of the protocols. According to Hovhannisian, Turkey wants Armenians to stop pushing for recognition of "genocide" and to acknowledge the territorial integrity of Turkey, thus accepting the Treaty of Kars, to which Armenia had not been a signatory. As to the third precondition, regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, Hovhannisian was confident that "Turkey expects one-sided concessions to satisfy Azerbaijan's appetite."

DRIVEN BY A SOCCER SCHEDULE?

14. (C) Speakers also asserted that the six weeks given for internal discussions was not a coincidence. The time period coincides with the October 14 World Cup qualifier match in Turkey, thereby leaving the door open for Sargsian to attend. The Dashnaks also noted that October 13 was the date when the Kars Treaty was signed, and therefore a symbolic day for the Turks. Lastly, rally speakers pointed out that the "Armenian Genocide Resolution" was still on the agenda of the U.S. Congress, and that Turkish policy was to stop it by all means possible. (Note: The six-week timeframe also coincides with the period when the Minsk Group co-Chairs are expected to present a revised version of the Madrid Principles to the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents. End Note).

ARMENIA LOSING GROUND

15. (C) According to Vahan Hovhannisian, the process of Armenia-Turkey rapprochement has so far only served the interests of Turkey. As a result, the process of worldwide recognition of the Armenian Genocide has been frozen; the international credibility of Turkey has grown significantly; Turkey has become a member of UN Security Council; and its prospects for E.U. membership have improved. Concurrently, Hovhannisian has seen only losses for Armenia such as U.S. President Obama's "backpedaling" by not using the term "genocide" in his April 24 remarks, the recent UN Appeals Court decision denying compensation to victims due to lack of such recognition by the USG, Russia's apathy toward Armenian interests, and the Diaspora's alienation from Armenia. As a result of the above signs of weakness, Hovhannisian stated that Georgia was daring to push back its border with Armenia and for the first time a Turkish diplomat actually insulted an Armenian President, advising him to "take a plane to Turkey" for the game (instead of coming over a border the GOAM has expressed hope would open in time for the match).

16. (C) In his speech, Dashnak MP Ara Nranian questioned the oft-promised benefits to the Armenian economy of opening the Armenian-Turkish border. According to Nranian, the Armenian market could not withstand growing Turkish economic influence in the region. Meanwhile, Armen Rustamian, Representative of the ARF Supreme Body and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission in the National Assembly, declared that Armenian officials had ignored the national security priorities of

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their country and are allowing themselves to fall into a Turkish-Azerbaijani trap. Rustamian also questioned why the protocol obliges both sides to open the border when it was Turkey that closed it unilaterally. As to NK, Rustamian reiterated the importance of involving NK leadership in the OSCE-brokered negotiations and pursuing the territory's independence as an Armenian foreign policy goal.

ARF: FOREIGN MINISTER SHOULD RESIGN

17. (SBU) Rustamian repeated ARF demands for the resignation of Foreign Minister Nalbandian, which he said would be a direct (and presumably welcome) signal to the whole world that Armenia is changing the course of its foreign policy. Hovhannisian also mentioned that the party would use the six-week period of review to expose the potential "landmines" existing in the Turkey-Armenia protocol and find ways to eliminate them. On NK, he added that the Dashnaktutyun Party would push for Sargsian's resignation if he officially adopted the Madrid Principles.

COMMENT

18. (C) The strong Dashnak opposition to Turkey-Armenia normalization comes as no surprise. But if the small rally turnout and level of engagement of the crowd is any indication, the Dashnaks' warnings have not yet captured the attention of the wider population. The audience consisted of a core group of about 200 persons close to the stage who were paying attention, with the rest teenagers who appeared to be little more than curious onlookers. The Dashnaks will continue to press their case through their media outlets here, and will no doubt enlist the support of diaspora groups in an effort to whip up popular sentiment against the deal with Turkey. The Dashnaks' arguments will be echoed by the opposition Heritage Party and, to a lesser extent, Levon Ter-Petrossian's Armenian National Congress. Whether this will be enough to turn Armenians against the President's Turkey policy remains to be seen, though at this moment it seems unlikely. The equation could change, however, once

other heavyweights -- former President Kocharian and former FM Oskanian, for example -- take a firm position on the protocols. On NK, however, the President has little room for maneuver, as any perceived concessions will be seen as giving in to Turkish pressure to link NK with the Turkey-Armenia process. END COMMENT
PENNINGTON